GIGANTOMACHY AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Augustan poets refer curiously often to the possible composition of a Gigantomachy,[1] as in Prop. 2.1 and 3.9, Ov. *Am.* 2.1.11 ff., *Trist.* 2.61 ff. and 331 ff., and the future study of natural philosophy, as in Verg. *Georg.* 2.475 ff. and Prop. 3.5.25 ff. These ambitions are rejected, abandoned, or firmly set in the future. I suggest that the function of both is closely similar since they provide traditionally sublime themes to contrast the poet's present 'humbler' task. As such they may be exploited for compliment or *recusatio* and can only with great caution be interpreted as evidence of the poet's genuine convictions. Their status as themes may be illuminated by an examination of rhetorical theory on noble concepts.

I

The standard noble themes of rhetorical theory are the gods, *τὰ θεῖα*, and great mortal deeds, especially battles. See Cic. *Part. Or.* 56 where naturally great subjects are 'ut caelestia, ut divina, ut eorum quorum obscurae causae, ut in terris mundoque admirabilia quae sunt', while conventionally great are love of gods, country, and family, or moral questions; Dem. *On Style* 75 *μεγάλη καὶ διαπρεπὴς πεζομαχία ἢ ναυμαχία ἢ περὶ οὐρανοῦ ἢ περὶ γῆς λόγος* (cf. grandeur in 5 of Plato's god in *Pol.* 269 c, in 237 of Salamis); and the more elaborate fourfold division in Hermogenes (*R.G.* ii. 287–90 Sp.; cf. Ps. Aristid. *R.G.* ii. 460–1 Sp.), firstly thoughts *περὶ θεῶν ὡς περὶ θεῶν* (e.g. the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*), secondly *περὶ τῶν θείων ὡς ὄντως θείων* (e.g. causes and nature of seasons or the universe, movements of land or sea, thunderbolts), thirdly *τὰ φύσει θεῖα, τὸ πλεῖστον δ'ἐν ἀνθρώποις θεωρεῖται* (e.g. the immortality of the soul, the nature of abstracts such as justice), fourthly entirely human but glorious deeds such as the battles of Marathon, Plataea, or Salamis.[2] Longinus reflects the same theory, as in 9.5–10 divine followed by heroic greatness, 12.5 *φυσιολογίαι* among sublime themes, and 35.4 the grandeur of nature seen not in small streams or fires but in large rivers and Ocean, heavenly fires and volcanic eruptions like Etna. We may also deduce a hierarchy of sublime themes, particularly from Hermogenes' rigorous progression from divine to human. (i) Divine takes precedence over human, the only exception being Demetrius, in keeping with his firm emphasis on historical narrative within his survey of the grand style. (ii) Within *τὰ θεῖα* natural philosophy outranks ethics; compare the grandeur of *τὰ φυσικά* in Men. Rh. *R.G.* iii.336 ff. and the elegantly simple style of the letter, which can rise to topics of moral philosophy (Sen. *Ep.* 118, Quint. 9.4.19) but not *φυσιολογίαι* (Demetrius 231).

Evidence for this rhetorical theory comes in part from sources later than the Augustan poets, but the grandeur of battles is an early topos (e.g. Ar. *Frogs* 1021), while the first three sources in Hermogenes are essentially prefigured in Cicero. I do not wish in any case to press the direct influence of rhetoric upon

[1] Like the Roman poets I use Gigantomachy and Titanomachy as synonyms. For the confusion see M. L. West on Hes. *Theog.* 617 ff.

[2] The passage is translated in full in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, pp.567–8.

the Augustan poets but to interpret some of their poetic ambitions within the framework of conventionally accepted categories of grandeur, a framework for which the rhetoricians provide useful evidence. If, then, we apply rhetorical theory to poetry, where epic had first place (e.g. Quint. 10.1.46 ff.), both Gigantomachy and natural philosophy are at least equal in status and by their association with the divine exploitable as superior to heroic epic and 'res gestae Augusti'. Though this hierarchy may be sabotaged by the acknowledged excellence of Homer, who composed only heroic epic, there is a descent in status as well as chronology in the sequence of divine, heroic, and historical epic seen in lists such as the *recusatio* of Prop. 2.1.19 ff., Manil. 3.5 ff., *Culex* 28 ff. Compare also the anonymous definition of epic preserved in Diomed. *Gramm.* i.483 K ἔπος ἐστὶ περιοχὴ θείων τε καὶ ἡρωικῶν καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων.

II

The combination of gods and battle makes the Gigantomachy the grandest theme of martial epic. Epic is the genre of 'res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella' (Hor. *A.P.* 73), but kings are themselves below Jupiter:

> regum timendorum in proprios greges,
> reges in ipsos imperium est Iovis,
> clari Giganteo triumpho,
> cuncta supercilio moventis. (Hor. *Odes* 3.4.5–8)

Horace aptly indicates that pre-eminence by use of the Gigantomachy theme, which is thus superior to 'res gestae Augusti' and a suitable source for compliment to Augustus ἀπὸ τοῦ μείζονος εἰς τὸ ἔλαττον as recommended by rhetorical theory.[1] So in *Odes* 3.4, a rare example of an extended narrative of the battle against the Giants in an Augustan poet, Horace couples the victories of Jupiter with those of Augustus. Ovid similarly exploits the comparison in *Trist.* 2.61 ff. and 331 ff., as does the unknown author of *Culex* 24 ff.[2]

The Gigantomachy is then high epic, the most extreme example of the 'thundering' style opposed to that of the slender elegance of Callimachus. It is presented in this light most clearly in Prop. 2.1.19 ff., where it both leads the list of epic themes rejected by the poet and reappears in the summatory contrast of 39–40:

> sed neque Phlegraeos Iovis Enceladique tumultus
> intonet angusto pectore Callimachus.

Callimachus himself probably provided the kernel for this contrast:[3] see *Aetia. fr.* 1.20 βροντᾶν οὐκ ἐμόν ἀλλὰ Διός; the most famous example of Zeus'

[1] e.g. of metaphors Ar. *Rh.* 1405^{a}15, Cic. *De Or.* 3.164, Dem. *On Style* 84.

[2] Such compliments to rulers are conventional, e.g. Call. *Hy.* 4.171 ff. See W. Meincke, *Untersuchungen zu den enkomiastischen Gedichten Theokrits*, Diss. Kiel, 1955. Comparison to Gigantomachy is perhaps rare in prose: note however Plu. *Galba* 1.6, [Liban.] *decl.* 43 (= 7.472 Foerster).

[3] See Nisbet–Hubbard on Hor. *Odes* 2.12.7; cf. W. Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom*, pp.31 ff. Though such epics were written (see Susemihl i.407, K. Ziegler, *Das hellenistische Epos*, p.21), we need not think of some specific Hellenistic Gigantomachy now lost. The theme alone was an adequate exemplar of greatness. Note too that it already had a place in literary polemic, as a hackneyed theme in Xenoph. B. 1.19–21 West.

thundering was against the Giants. Though found in Hesiod, therefore, the Gigantomachy does not lend itself to interpretation as Hesiodic opposed to Homeric and so Alexandrian, as has been suggested of both Prop. 2.1 and 3.9 (see M. E. Hubbard, *Propertius*, pp.100 and 112). The progression of thought is much disputed in 3.9.47 ff., where Propertius promises Maecenas to attempt, 'te duce', themes of Gigantomachy and early Rome. The Gigantomachy must, however, point to 'thundering' epic and forces us to refer the Roman topics similarly (especially in view of the similar conjunction in 2.1).[1] There is no promise of forthcoming Aetia of early Rome but a humorous *recusatio*: Propertius, like Maecenas, is not suited to grandeur: if however (but significantly in the future, not the present) Maecenas is imagined as leading the way to, of all themes, the Gigantomachy, we smile at the paradox—and are intended to believe neither the lead nor Propertius' promise. This future epic by Maecenas is comparable to and quite as unlikely as the future prose history of Augustus' deeds similarly attributed to him in a future tense, 'dices': so Hor. *Odes* 2.12, again in the context of a *recusatio* by the poet; this projected history is all the more humorously implausible, as Mr. J. Griffin reminds me, if Augustus regularly mocked Maecenas' exotic prose-style as 'myrobrechis cincinnos' (Suet. *Aug.* 86).

Ovid's Gigantomachy is similarly unreal.[2] In *Am.* 2.1.11 ff. it is part of the joke for Ovid to present himself as attempting that most grandiose of themes when his natural talent lay with love-elegy. He thus restates in more extreme form the *recusatio* of epic in *Am.* 1.1; the joke is indeed spoiled if he did compose a Gigantomachy, since he then denigrates a published work. Contrast his more tactful handling of the rival claims of tragedy and elegy in *Am.* 3.1, where he does not deny his ability to tackle tragedy (after all he did compose the *Medea*) but defers her moment of triumph: elegy is his current task, but 'a tergo grandius urget opus' (3.1.70). This final twist has added effect from contrast with the regular dénouement of such a contest—the firm rejection of one contestant, as in Prodicus' choice of Heracles (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21 ff.) or that of Lucian between Sculpture and Education (Luc. *Somn.* 14). The probable seriousness of this promise to write tragedy, prepared already in *Am.* 2.18, is confirmed by its reappearance in the final *envoi* (3.15.17–18). The isolated reference to the Gigantomachy in *Am.* 2.1 exists only for the contrast with love poetry, as in a later use of the same motif, in *Met.* 10.148 ff., where Orpheus announces he earlier wrote a Gigantomachy 'plectro graviore' but will now sing love themes 'leviore lyra'.[3]

In *Tristia* 2.61 ff. and 331 ff. Ovid couples Gigantomachy with the deeds of Augustus in obvious flattery to the emperor: but though willing, Ovid has the strength for neither theme, an example of the *recusatio* which gives oblique praise within a denial of ability to give that praise (cf. e.g. Hor. *Odes*. 4.15, *Ep.* 2.1.250 ff.). It is good Ovidian elegance that after announcing that banal

[1] Cf. Manil. 3.5 ff., *Culex* 28 ff. Its high status similarly makes the Gigantomachy a suitable comparison to the contemplated future poem on philosophy in *Ciris* 29 ff.

[2] In his edition of *Tristia* II (1924, pp.63–81) S. G. Owen provides a useful survey but fails to convince that Ovid did write a Gigantomachy. For strong arguments against its composition see F. Pfister, *RhMus* 70 (1915), 472–4, and E. Reitzenstein, *RhMus* 84 (1935), 87–8.

[3] The Gigantomachy as the extreme of epic is suitable for the higher bards of antiquity, as Orpheus here, Thamyris (Heracl. Pont. *fr.* 157 Wehrli), and Apollo himself in Sen. *Agam.* 338 ff., a passage modelled on Ovid with similar polar contrast of poems of 'lusus' and Gigantomachy.

future intention of tackling a Gigantomachy, 'at si me iubeas . . .' (333), he gains an effective climax for the second theme, Augustus, by an abrupt change to past tense: 'et tamen ausus eram' (337). He pleads that he had even attempted it, but we believe this enterprise no more than the similarly introduced idea of celebrating the triumph of Tiberius in *Ex Pont.* 2.5.27 ff. 'ausus sum . . . nec potui coepti pondera ferre mei', or the attempted Gigantomachy of *Am.* 2.1.11 'ausus eram, memini, caelestia dicere bella',[1] where the close verbal echo of the earlier passage reinforces the unreality and probable irony in *Trist.* 2.337.

Gigantomachies continued to be composed, chosen for the grandeur of the theme as by the sophist Scopelian, who attempted not only tragedy but *οὕτω τι μεγαλοφωνίας ἐπὶ μεῖζον ἤλασεν, ὡς καὶ Γιγαντίαν ξυνθεῖναι παραδοῦναί τε Ὁμηρίδαις ἀφορμὰς ἐς τὸν λόγον* (Philostr. *V.S.* 1.21). But for Augustan poets it provided only allusive reference (cf. Manil. 3.5 ff.) or a colourful ecphrasis (cf. *Aetna* 41 ff.). For poets in search of a truly serious theme its grandeur suffered from at least one serious disadvantage other than banality: the Gigantomachy showed the morally reprehensible aspect of the Olympian gods and required allegorical interpretation if it was to show the gods as they ought to be. Note Long. 9.7–8 where Homer's theomachy is unfavourably compared to an epiphany of Poseidon in all his pure godhead.[2] Following, therefore, a tradition at least as early as Pindar (*P.* 1.15), Horace offers just such an allegory of his Gigantomachy in *Odes* 3.4, presenting it as a fight between controlled and uncontrolled strength, 'vis consili expers mole ruit sua' (3.4.65). Allegorical undercurrent is similarly likely in *Odes* 2.12.6–9, where Heracles' defeat of the Giants is followed by, and so implicitly a parallel to, the deeds of Augustus.[3] Conversely the author of the *Aetna* is able to demote the Gigantomachy in favour of his own rationalist explanation of Etna's fires by attacking its impiety (41–2). The Gigantomachy does not, therefore, appear in the sublime themes recommended by the rhetoricians, who wish us to show the gods as truly gods (see Hermog. l.c.).

III

A poet in search of a serious divine theme will turn to the type of theme suggested by the rhetoricians—as for example Etna, which can represent *κινήσεις γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης* in Hermogenes, is among the natural wonders of nature praised in Long. 35.4, and is 'hunc sollemnem omnibus poetis locum' (Sen. *Ep.* 79.5). The list of rhetorical themes of *τὰ θεῖα* is very close to the lists found in Verg. *Georg.* 2.477 ff. and Prop. 3.5.25 ff., appearing also in comparable order as they move from the order of heaven to earthly phenomena such as storms and earthquakes: 'unde tremor terris, qua vi maria alta tumescant' (Verg. *Georg.* 2.479) is particularly close to Hermogenes' *κινήσεις γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης*. Propertius indeed moves duly from god and *τὰ θεῖα* (25–38) to Hermogenes' third category of sublime themes, with speculation on the nature of the soul and justice (39–48)—admittedly treated in the more attractively poetic form of an Underworld mythology. Similar lists appear elsewhere in poets, e.g. Prop.

[1] For 'audere' as the 'vox propria' for such doomed enterprises see C. W. Macleod, *CQ* NS 27 (1977), 362, n.14. Add Ov. *Am.* 2.18.4 'et tener ausuros grandia frangit amor'.

[2] See Russell ad loc., cf. Cic. *De N.D.* 1.42.

[3] On these and further allegorical Gigantomachies both in literature and in public sculpture see Nisbet–Hubbard on *Odes* 2.12.7.

2.34.51–4, Hor. *Ep.* 1.12.14 ff.[1] (in reverse order to that in Hermogenes, moving from earthly phenomena to heaven), and Ov. *Met.* 15.66 ff. If we ignore the special pleading on vegetarianism in Pythagoras' speech, the first outline (*Met.* 15.67–72) moves from the origins and nature of the universe to exploration of the causes of phenomena like snow and the thunderbolt to 'quid quateret terras' and in short 'quodcumque latet', which is similar to 'quorum obscurae causae' in Cic. *Part. Or.* 56), while other details recall Hermogenes. Again, in 176 ff. we move from flux as seen in the whole universe, the heavenly bodies, seasons and age, with movement towards earth and then men. There is a similar sequence in 237 ff., from (i) the universe, (ii) the earth, especially movements of earth and sea, and (iii) great mortal deeds of early epic and history. The organization is that of Hermogenes' second category, and mortal deeds as there follow the divine.

We are then, I think, justified in arguing from rhetorical theory not only that natural philosophy might as a literary theme claim great grandeur, more so than moral philosophy, but that the pre-eminent theme will be the nature of the universe and its creation. It is probably no accident that the final example of divine grandeur in Long. 9.9 is an example of god as truly god and in the act of creation—Genesis 1, an unusual example from Hebrew literature, but one which combines the first rhetorical category of Hermogenes with the most sublime theme in the second, the origin of the world. This song of creation is precisely that given to Orpheus in Ap. Rh. 1.496 ff.; compare also the song of Silenus (Verg. *Ecl.* 6.31 ff.) and Iopas (*Aen.* 1.742 ff.). This theme does not then suggest the didactic Alexandrian tradition (so e.g. Austin in his valuable note on *Aen.* 1.742 ff.) but rather the poet's highest calling. We may note that it is on the basis of seriousness that ancient critics disputed the appropriateness of Iopas' song in the setting of a dinner-party (Macrob. 7.1.14) and Servius' comparison of the song of Mars and Venus' adulterous love in *Georg.* 4.345–7 leads one to suspect that Virgil intended the contrast and deliberately made more decorous the equivalent scene in Homer's *Odyssey* where Demodocus sang of that same adulterous love (*Od.* 8.266 ff.).[2] Echoes of Lucretian style when Virgil touches on topics of natural philosophy are partly a compliment to his great predecessor, but also acknowledge that the more archaic, sonorous style is appropriate to the more sublime theme—just as there is increased grandeur of style when Jupiter speaks in majesty (e.g. *Aen.* 10.105 ff.). Philosophic epic may be written in the 'slender' Alexandrian style (e.g. Aratus' *Phaenomena*), but its themes were more traditionally appropriate to the 'thundering' style of a Lucretius. Didactic epics on subjects such as crops are in a different category, and it is here that Hesiod's *Works and Days* provided Callimacheans with a useful counter to Homer. It is worth noting how Longinus exploits the traditional grandeur of such themes of natural philosophy to rout Callimachus by use of his own imagery: small streams, however useful, and small fires lack the impressiveness of large rivers, ocean, and the fires of heavenly bodies or Etna (35.4): it would be interesting to know if

[1] Horace pours scorn on such themes, perhaps reflecting real-life attitudes to such μετέωρα but probably also mocking grandiose pretensions, as with the Pindaric efforts of Titius in *Ep.* 1.3.9 ff.

[2] For such 'corrections' of Homer see R. R. Schlunk, *The Homeric Scholia and the Aeneid* (1974). Add Verg. *Aen.* 8.243 ff., where Virgil avoids the detail in Hom. *Il.* 20.61 ff. that Pluto felt fear that his realm would be torn open, precisely the point criticised by Long. 9.6–7. Virgil more decorously shows the shades in fear, 'trepident immisso lumine Manes' (246).

philosophic epic was earlier ranged against Callimachus, in which case Apollonius' song of Orpheus (1.496 ff.) might be anti-Callimachean. The evidence is lacking, but the contrast is easily drawn.

The real seriousness of themes of natural philosophy makes it a more attractive ambition, and so makes it more difficult for us to assess the sincerity of the promises in Verg. *Georg.* 2.457 ff., Prop. 3.5.25 ff., and *Ciris* 1 ff. to turn later to philosophy. The sheer warmth of expression in Virgil moves us, yet I doubt if Virgil is here obtruding his own future aspirations. It is the present context which matters, a powerful introduction to the following praise of Lucretian epic (i.e. 'I wish I too might be able to tackle that mighty theme, how glorious Lucretius is'). If so, Virgil develops the traditional superiority of natural philosophy over mere agricultural didactic to praise a poetic predecessor—but also to pay himself a delicate compliment by coupling his own present work, and significantly drawing attention to its 'highest' aspect, the gods: 'fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis' (493).[1] He may well be suggesting that his work too shares the loftier concerns of Lucretius, presenting the true nature of the world.[2]

Scholars have been less tempted to take Prop. 3.5.25 ff. at face value.[3] Propertius begins by defending erotic poetry, but this is suitable only for the young (19). Forestalling argument that in later age he should turn to Augustan epic, he develops the *recusatio* to present an intention, usefully distant but conventionally honourable and so sufficient to excuse him, that he will turn to natural philosophy in old age: both erotic and philosophic themes are thus neatly contrasted with the 'arma' of the final couplet: it is for others to restore the standards of Crassus, just as it is for others, he argues implicitly, to attempt Augustan epic. There is also mocking treatment of these themes of philosophy, as he exudes boredom by the close echo of both Virgil and rhetorical theory in the banal list of topics reserved for his old age: of his two alternatives we are thus left with strong enthusiasm only for his present work, love-elegy. We may perhaps compare here the probably deliberate boredom of Pythagoras' speech in Ov. *Met.* 15 in contrast to the more poetic possibilities of Ovid's narrative mythology elsewhere.[4]

In neither Virgil nor Propertius should we take the proposed future project as a farewell to poetry[5] but rather as a move from one form of poetry to another and superior one as explicitly in *Ciris* 1 ff. where the author more traditionally contrasts his future more ambitious aspirations to write poetry on the nature of the universe with his present 'slender' verse. We may also compare a further Augustan poet, Horace, who presents his move from love-poetry to moral

[1] For focus on the divine to dignify the high status of a current work cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.1.13, 'Caesaris arma canant alii: nos Caesaris aras . . .'

[2] For the laws of nature and god see e.g. *Georg.* 1.60–1, L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil*, Ch. 3. Virgil may perhaps with similar delicacy assert his combination of Alexandrian 'slenderness' and the higher didactic in *Georg.* 4.1 ff., where the slight bees ('in tenui labor' 4.6) are humorously described in terms recalling the rhetoricians' list of great themes: 'caelestia' . . . 'admiranda' (cf. Cic. *Part. Or.* 56 'admirabilia'), followed by warfare and morals.

[3] See E. Courtney, *BICS* 16 (1969), 70–2, who notes Propertius' scorn for such themes in 2.34.27–8 and 51–4 and his desire to retract the rash promise of 2.10.7–8 to tackle martial epic in old age: 'aetas prima canat Veneres, extrema tumultus;/bella canam, quando scripta puella mea est.'

[4] See G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, pp.104–7.

[5] [Verg.] *Catalepton* 5 has perhaps had undue influence here.

philosophy in terms of a move also from poetry to philosophy, but is in fact moving to poetry of moral philosophy:[1]

> nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono:
> quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum.
> (*Ep.* 1.1.11–2)

It is similarly philosophic epic which Virgil and Propertius contemplate. Unlike Horace, however, these are hopes for the future, not the present, ambitions therefore which we should interpret primarily as convenient poetic fictions to fit the immediate context. The same is true of Virgil's promise in *Georg.* 3.16 ff. to compose a poem with a central temple to Augustus. He may herald the *Aeneid* (or a seriously projected but never completed 'res gestae Augusti'—so E. Norden, *Kleine Schriften*, pp.400 ff.), but the passage is in its context an effective complimentary *recusatio*, providing Augustus with a central position half-way through the poem comparable to the promised position of the temple. The lines may well describe the present work,[2] in which case Virgil as elsewhere imagines it as not yet complete: cf. 4.116 ff., 'extremo ni iam sub fine laborum . . .'[3]

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[1] So too in *Odes* 4.1 Horace marks his return to love poetry as a return to love. The poet views his genre as synonymous with its characteristic content. See C. W. Macleod, *CQ* 27 (1977), 362 n.16.

[2] See e.g. K. Büchner, *RE*, s.v. 'P. Vergilius Maro', U. Fleischer, *Hermes* 88 (1960), 280–331.

[3] I wish to thank Mr. J. Griffin, Mr. A. S. Hollis, and Mr. D. A. Russell for helpful comments on an earlier draft.